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ABSTRACT

Teachers' questions concerning a proposed master teacher incentive pay plan for Tennessee are stated in this address. Questions teachers raised most frequently centered around four main issues: recertification/tenure, fair evaluations, across-the-board pay raises, and promotion quotas. Summaries of teachers' discussions on each issue are presented and solutions to problems are suggested. (RH)

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THE TENNESSEE PLAN--A DISCUSSION OF TEACHER-RELATED ASPECTS OF THE "BETTER SCHOOLS PROGRAM" UNDER DEVELOPMENT BY THE GOVERNOR AND LEGISLATURE

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Thank you ! I know some of you are not from Indiana. But I am so excited to be back in Indiana. When I was a little girl we traveled many times from Louisville, Kentucky to Grand Rapids, Michigan. That was before the interstate system and I really believed, as a little girl that all the United States was Indiana because it took so long to get from one end to the other !

I have lived in other states besides Kentucky, Michigan and Tennessee. But never in my life have I been as proud as I am today to be a Tennessean. Before long the Volunteer state will be known, not only as Country Music USA, but also as a state with one of the greatest educational systems in our Nation.

When the first proposals for the Better Schools Program came out last January, 1983, the questions and concerns came flying about the Master Teacher Incentive Pay Plan. Many of these questions came from a lack of understanding and knowledge of the proposals and part was due to an honest need to change some of the concepts in the plan to better meet the needs of teachers.

As the Governor, Interim Commission and Legislators listened to the concerns of teachers, the bill was revised and updated many, many times until the final bill was released last week. (Nov. 1983)

The questions teachers raised the most centered around four main issues.

(1) Recertification-Tenure

(2) Fair Evaluations

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(3) Across-the-board Pay Raise

(4) Quotas

In the next few minutes I plan to address more specifically these concerns and how, with constant open communication with teachers, many of their needs have been met.

RECERTIFICATION

In the area of recertification questions raised were: Would I lose my certificate to teach if I failed to meet the evaluation criteria ? If another teacher qualified for my slot, could I lose my place on the Career Ladder even after being in it only for a year ?

The solution was to remove the five-year recertification requirement. You would not lose your job or be denied your supplement for that five-year period or for any reason unless there was cause for dismissal. Standards will be raised to qualify Senior and Distinguished Senior Teachers to reearn supplements.

TENURE

Concerns about tenure were: As a tenured teacher, if I lost my certificate I could not be employed. Also the appeal process is too vague and inadequate.

Solution: You are still guaranteed the same rights and job security. Tenure provides protection and due process for competent teachers. The due process procedures have been extensively expanded with detailed avenues and directions for appeal and review to protect teachers. Teachers can still maintain their present status for an extended year while the appeal process is taking place.

EVALUATION

Questions concerning evaluations were: How do you evaluate fairly ? Who would set the standards for evaluations ? Who would do the evaluation ? Would the evaluation be based on pupil performance ? Would the evaluators know how to evaluate ? Would they be trained to understand teaching situations and evaluative techniques ?

Solution: These questions created the most discussion among educators. To answer teachers' questions, the bill introduces the concept of evaluating teams coming from outside the teachers' school disctict. A teacher can strike one member of this team if they feel uncomfortable with that evaluator.

Who would set standards ? Over this past summer, the Tennessee Teachers Study Council was formed to give teachers input on the evaluation criteria. Every school and school system was represented.

Approximately 4000 representatives attended these sessions. The Commission received over 500 letters in the initial stages of development. 95 percent of those teachers that attended, responded favorably to the competency. With ongoing communication Study Council meetings are still being held to pick apart evaluative criteria. The teachers will set standards for evaluations and make recommendations to the Interim Commission.

Teaching situations would have to be taken into account and be based on skills important to teaching and teachers' ability to motivate.

Pupil performance data would carry about 20 percent of the weight of the criteria.

To train educators the bill provides a Principal-Administrator Academy under the Department of Education. The Academy is not a single institution but a framework for a wide array of educational training programs. The purpose is to instill and reinforce instructional leadership for educational effectiveness.

The purpose of evaluation is to improve instruction, to build on strengths and improve weaknesses.

Pre- and post- conferences will be held with the teacher in order to best understand that individuals present teaching situation.

ACROSS-THE-BOARD PAY RAISE

The most popular questions raised were: Why not pay raise for all teachers ? Why would a teacher want incentive pay supplements if it takes too many years to receive it ?

Solution: New teachers will still receive across-the-board pay raises with first chance for pay supplement after four years of teaching.

Incentive supplenents would be reviewed at least every four years. There is no question that all teachers need salary increases. When many hold two or three jobs and when the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics reports that the average teachers' salary for 1981-82 was $19,042 which is $6000 below what is considered a moderate budget for a family of four, the teachers are justified with this complaint.

A minimum of 10 percent across-the-board pay raise has been included with incentive pay on top of state and local supplements.

QUOTAS

Finally the question of Quotas. The common discussion was: only a few would receive the incentive pay on the career ladders.

Solution: Over the course of the past nine or ten months the teachers concerns were heard. Quotas were revised many times and then eliminated !

All teachers who meet standards can move to the appropriate career ladder.

Let me leave you with a few final thoughts. I am more than anxious to be a part of this program. This Master Teacher concept will encompass the entire teaching occupation. At the skating rink yesterday a teacher said to me, "I am still not in full agreement of this plan, but it will be up to me and all teachers to make it work." If the public is willing to put more money into education, then I want to take pride in my profession and become more accountable.

I am 99% in favor of this bill. It does not answer all the problems we have in education, but it is a start.

Teachers do support incentive pay concept for doing a more effective job. Polls by the Tennessee Journal indicate 62% of the teachers surveyed felt that teachers should be paid more for being more effective. The percentage on the same question appeared in a survey conducted by the American School Board Journal.

Citizens across Tennessee support the plan. Over 40,000 signatures have been received on petitions to send to the legislators in January. Their support is the most important.

A quote from The Nation At Risk reads, "It is by our willingness to take up the challenge, and our resolve to see it through, that America's place in the world will be either secured or forfeited."

We must take advantage of this new-found momentum and change the course of education.

Thank you

Nancy Simpkins